

# LANDOWNERS



## LEGISLATIVE • ALERT



by **JAY JENSEN**  
Washington Office  
National Association of State Foresters

**T**HE battle for next year's federal appropriations has begun on Capitol Hill. The President released the administration's budget for fiscal year 2001 in February, which included some promising numbers related to the USDA-Forest Service's State & Private Forestry programs.

Unfortunately, the administration did not propose an increase for the primary forest landowner assistance program in the country, the Forest Stewardship Program. The two other forest landowner assistance programs vital to the non-industrial private forest landowner, the Stewardship Incentives Program and the Forestry Incentives Program, are both struggling to stay above water.

### Forest Stewardship Program

The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP), delivered through the state foresters, provides technical forest management assistance to the non-industrial private forest landowner. In other words, FSP gives the private forest landowner access to a forester who will draft a forest management plan according to the landowner's priorities and objectives. In Alabama, the Forest Stewardship Program is called TREASURE Forest.

The national program has seen slow but steady increases over the past couple of years and now stands appropriated at \$29.43 million for fiscal year 2000. The administration is supporting the same figure for FY 2001.

The figure is somewhat surprising considering the findings of a recent study conducted by Northern Illinois University, "Evaluating the Forest Stewardship Program through a National Survey of Participating Forest Land Owners." The study surveyed over 1,200 landowners that have participated in the FSP and have a stewardship plan in place. In the words of the study's lead author J. Dixon Esseks, "The bottom line here is that we have a program that seems to work!"

The primary finding of the study is that the program encourages landowners to more actively manage and invest in their forestland. With the technical and cost-share assistance provided through the program, it was found that landowners were three times more likely to begin implementing the FSP plan and one-and-a-half times more likely to apply new conservation practices they had not implemented on their lands before. The study also found that, on average, landowners were willing to invest more of their own money into land conservation measures on their property.

The study shows that federal money invested in helping private landowners leverages significant state AND private resources to accomplish private landowner objectives. These objectives benefit the nation as a whole with an increased available timber supply, cleaner air and water and more abundant wildlife. The state foresters will take this message to Capitol

Hill this year to seek an increase of just over \$7 million for the Forest Stewardship Program in fiscal year 2001. The state foresters feel that a level of \$36.5 million better meets the needs of the over 9 million non-industrial private forest landowners in the country.

### Stewardship Incentives Program

The Stewardship Incentives Program is the cost-share compliment to the FSP. SIP is structured to provide incentive for landowners to implement conservation practices to reinvest in, reforest, and manage their lands. Pressures from development, land cost increases and the frequently associated tax increases, and pressure to meet the market demand for wood products in the wake of supply reductions from federal public lands are all converging on private woodland owners. These factors all encourage the landowner to make poor land management decisions that could potentially lead to resource impairment that can take decades to repair.

Unfortunately, support for SIP in Congress and the administration has dwindled over the past two years and has resulted in the zeroing out of the program. Although the administration has chosen to support the program at a woefully inadequate \$3.25 million in fiscal year 2001, the state foresters will be directing energy toward the formulation and development of a new nationwide cost-share program. In the meantime, the state foresters will continue supporting the Forestry Incentives Program.

### Forestry Incentives Program

The Forestry Incentives Program (FIP), used primarily in the Southern U.S., has limped along near the \$6 million level for the past few years. Support in Congress, and in particular the administration, remains disappointing and FIP survives only with the help of a few key Southern legislators. In Fiscal Year 2001, the administration has not proposed any funding, even though a significant customer base exists for this timber cost-share program. Again, the state foresters will be seeking to incorporate a new cost-share program in the 2002 Farm Bill that will provide the reforestation flexibility that FIP has provided to its customers. 🌲